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The Duty of Commemorating the Deeds of our Fathers.

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# S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE

WINTHROP CHURCH, CHARLESTOWN,

JUNE 18, 1865.

BY

JEREMIAH EAMES RANKIN.

PASTOR.

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DEDICATION.

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To

THE YOUNG MEN

*of the*

Winthrop Church and Congregation,

BY WHOSE REQUEST IT IS PUBLISHED,

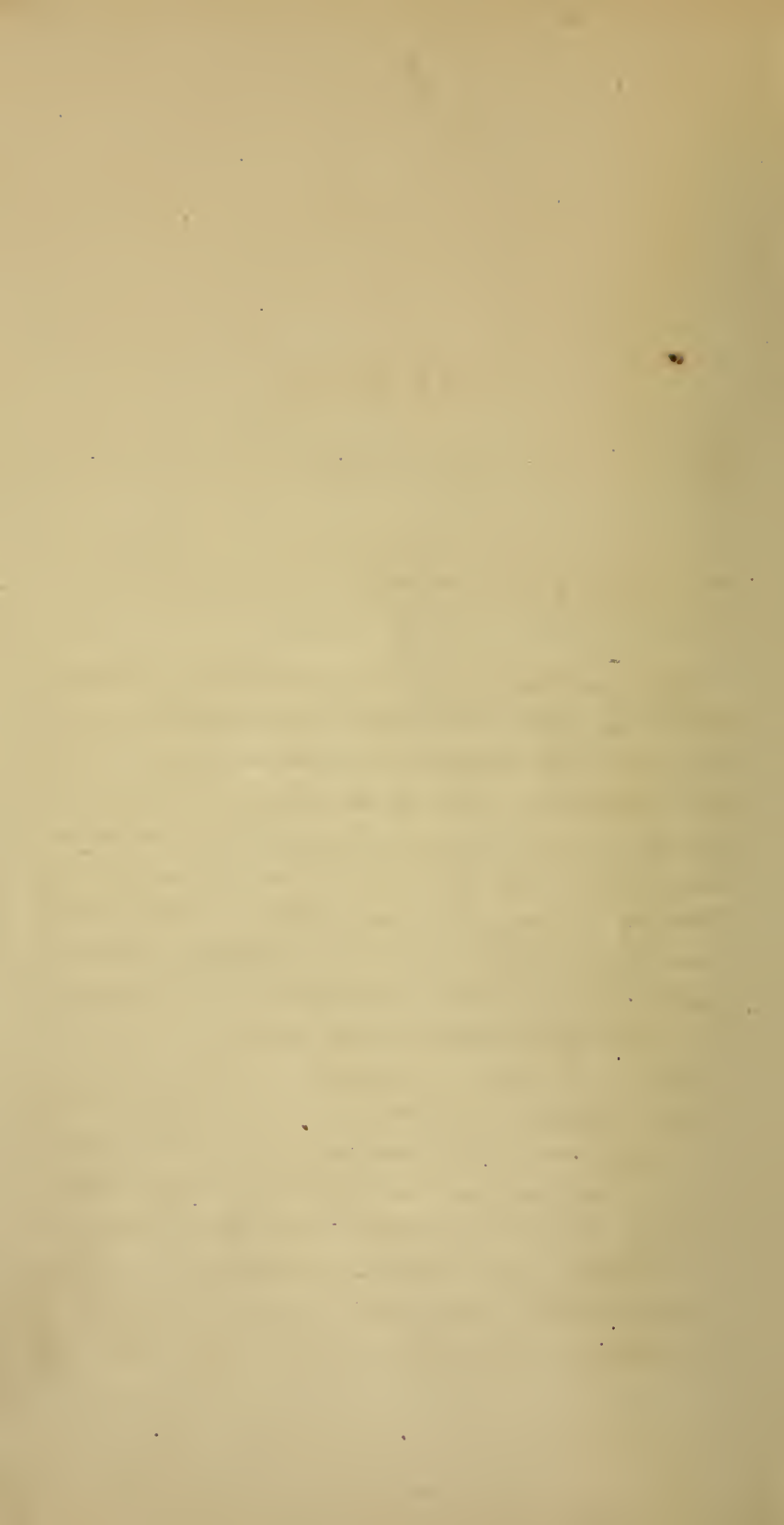
THIS SERMON

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

BY

THEIR PASTOR,

WITH THE PRAYER THAT THEY MAY BE AS FAITHFUL TO THE CIVIL AND  
RELIGIOUS LIBERTIES OF THE COUNTRY AS HAVE  
BEEN THEIR FATHERS.



## S E R M O N .

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JOSH. iv. 6, 7. "WHEN YOUR CHILDREN ASK THEIR FATHERS, IN TIME TO COME, WHAT MEAN YE BY THESE STONES, THEN YE SHALL ANSWER THEM, THESE STONES SHALL BE A MEMORIAL UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL FOREVER."

THE event here to be commemorated was a miracle. When the feet of the priests that bore the ark of the Lord, the vanguard of God's advancing hosts, but touched the edge of the Jordan, its tides, rolling on in their harvest fulness, were instantaneously stayed, and piled up in one overhanging but harmless volume, while the children of Israel passed over to the other side. The memory of this interposition was, by divine direction, to be transmitted to future generations by the erection of a monument at the first resting-place beyond the river. Twelve stones, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel, and taken from the bed of the Jordan, where the feet of the priests had been firmly planted, were to be heaped one upon another as a memorial; and, in lieu of inscriptions, the whole Hebrew nation was to stand as an interpreter of its design to the latest posterity. When their chil-

dren inquired the meaning of this memorial, they were to reply: These are the rocks made sacred by the feet of your fathers, when they stood between the divided river; and this is the spot where they first encamped after entering upon the land of promise.

The duty of suitably commemorating the great events of a nation's history ought not to be neglected by the Christian patriot. And as I have thought that the ninetieth anniversary of that battle whose echoes then rang around the civilized world,—fought upon an eminence within a stone's throw of our church-edifice, distinguished by a historic shaft, whose foundations were built into the soil that so freely drank the blood of our fathers, and beneath whose friendly shadow our children play,—ought not to pass without some proper religious recognition, I have selected this as the theme of the present discourse.

It is true, indeed, that in an important sense this anniversary is national and not local. We cannot, if we would, appropriate to ourselves the honor of that early conflict. If the nation was rocked into existence in Faneuil Hall, these rivers and these surrounding hills first echoed to the voice of her struggling life. Defeated on yonder height, she retreated to other fields, where she was finally victorious. It was not merely a few citizens of Cambridge and Charlestown and other neighboring places, who, on June 16th, 1775, paraded at

sunset on the University common, and after the prayer of President Langdon, repaired, with arms and entrenching tools, to Charlestown heights. It was a new nation making her first real though scarcely conscious stand for the right of self-government, — of self-existence. That eminence was then consecrated as a nation's altar, and Warren and his fellow-patriots fell there as a nation's sacrifice.

And yet, it would be unpardonable in the inhabitants of this city, if they did not cherish a local pride in this anniversary, and the event which it commemorates. That soil, consecrated by the first considerable conflict for national independence, is within our city limits. Up that very hill, where in winter the school-boy coasts, the haughty Briton twice led his well-trained troops, only to see them swept back in confusion beneath the reserved and steady fire of yeoman muskets. These very heavens reflected back the light of the five hundred burning dwellings of Charlestown. We live upon this historic ground; and God forbid that we should ever ignore or misprize the sacred associations which cluster around us. God forbid that even the stirring and wonderful events of the last few years should displace our recollections of earlier patriotism, of earlier sacrifices, of earlier achievements. Our national history is one history; and though later clusters of glorified ones are introduced into the country's galaxy, yet the fixed stars, which have so long and so benignantly shone there,

can never lose their lustre. Though Ellsworth and Lincoln are in the nearer heavens, in the more remote, their position eternally secure, are Warren and Washington.

The question has frequently been agitated, whether the expenditure which has been lavished upon monuments and statues is not an unreasonable and needless one. To my own mind, this is much like the question asked by one Judas Iscariot, when a certain woman anointed the Saviour's head with "ointment of spikenard, very precious:" "Why was this waste? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence and given to the poor." We are creatures of sentiment, as well as utility. There is a time when lavish expenditure is no waste, and but a worthy tribute of affection and reverence; when the fragments of the alabaster-box speak more eloquently than words: "Let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me. She is come beforehand to anoint my body for the burying."

There were, doubtless, men of the last generation, who severely commented on the folly of such a stupendous structure of stone as now crowns the summit of yonder hill. They would have argued, "Let these granite blocks repose in their native bed at Quincy. Spare all these painful toils: blasting and hewing, freighting and erecting. Give your one hundred and fifty thousand dollars to some benevolent enterprise. The fame of Bunker Hill is se-

cure. Warren is already immortal." The fallacy of this censure consists in this: that there is a time when treasure should be expended, not only with no reference to utility, but with entire disregard of it; should be expended simply and solely for purposes of sentiment,—to commemorate some great achievement, to transmit some distinguished name. The twelve stones at Gilgal were placed there purposely to provoke the inquiry, "What mean ye by these stones?" The stones were to have a language of their own; they were to stand solitary by this pathway of empire, while they discoursed of the past.

Men say to-day, "Put up no monuments. Build a hospital or a college." Hospitals and colleges are good things, and not to be spoken against; and so also are monuments. There are men in the world whose turn of mind is so utilitarian that they would convert Bunker Hill Monument itself into an observatory, a windmill, or a lighthouse, rather than leave it to speak its own language of grandeur. It stands there to commemorate, not to be used; or, rather, to commemorate is its use. It stands there to speak of that midnight toil with pickaxe and spade, within hearing of the "All's well!" of British sentinels on Copp's Hill and men-of-war in the harbor. It stands there to speak of the hot and bloody work on the morrow. And to employ it for any other purpose would be desecration.

When we consider the results, immediate and more

remote, of that struggle, June 17th, 1775,—when we remember how freely our fathers then laid down their lives for us their children,—we may well ask, if any amount of expense, for the sole purpose of commemorating and transmitting to posterity the record of their achievements, can be regarded as *waste*? Should not the only language of that majestic structure be, not beauty, not utility, but commemoration? The sturdy and unadorned massiveness of that pile of gray stone, towering with its simple story of New England heroism toward the heavens till almost lost in their clouds, and so built into the solid earth that it can rock only with her own rockings,—this is an appropriate monument to their memory. Like it, they stood there on that June mid-day, in their unadorned grandeur, springing forth from their simple homes, a band of patriots unconquered and unconquerable.

Among the arguments in favor of such memorials as monuments and anniversaries is the consideration that they cultivate the feeling of nationality. “These stones shall be a memorial unto the children of Israel forever.” They would be a memorial to all spectators; but especially to the children of Israel, because they commemorated an event so distinguished in the history of their fathers. One method, by which Jehovah made the Hebrew nation one and indivisible in its interests as a theocracy, was to bind it together by its memories. “I am the Lord thy God, which brought



thee up out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage." "Brought thee!" not thine ancestors, but *thee, a nation!* Thou, a nation, walkedst through the Red Sea, between those trembling walls, which waited only for the chariots of thy foes. Thou wast led through the forty years' wandering in the wilderness.

New England has been accustomed to make more of the early history of her ancestors than any other portion of the nation. And, as a consequence, the sentiment of nationality has been stronger with her than with any other section of the country. She felt that this nation was moored to Plymouth Rock, and built under the brow of Bunker Hill; and that to allow it to be disintegrated was to destroy the work of the fathers; that its rapid growth and power were in answer to their prayers; and that to put a stop to this growth and power by violence and bloodshed was to defeat the prophetic instincts of their faith. The newer portions of the country had not our consecrated memories; the Southern portion were false to theirs. The New Englander has been taught to feel that the men who came wafted across wintry seas in the *Mayflower*, and who stood shoulder to shoulder upon the crest of Bunker Hill, were one and the same with himself; and when asked whether he would betray and parcel out any of that country, which they called their own, to a hostile type of civilization, or rather to a refined barbarism,—to the

political high-priests of the rebellion,—his reply was an indignant and persistent negative. This was disloyalty to the fathers, it was treason to the very life of the nation.

This deficiency in the historic, which must necessarily attach to so young a nation as our own, the four years' conflict, which has just triumphantly closed, has forever supplied. Every battle fought, whether successful or unsuccessful, whether by land or by sea; every hero lost, whether officer or private, has deepened the feeling of nationality. The men who through such vicissitudes and alternations have yielded to the inspiration of the same leaders and followed the fortunes of the same flag, the dust of whose associates is mingled together on so many a hallowed field, are henceforth knit more closely together in the sacred oneness of national life. As the cold bars of iron, which the workman would unite, cannot be made one without the hot blast of the furnace and the heavy blows of the hammer, so the great Being, who shapes national character and destiny, first heated us in this furnace, and then welded us so indissolubly together that seam or rift is henceforth impossible. East or West, North or regenerated South, we are to have a national interest paramount to all sectional ones.

We had been scattering our teeming population over vast territories. Each Congress almost had christened a new State. Every influence was centrifugal. Our population was growing more and

more heterogeneous. For four long years, God breathed upon us with his hot breath, and let his ponderous blows descend; and we are one, as never before. He has consecrated battle-fields all over the land. And just as the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church, so the blood of patriots is the seed of nationality. We begin to make truthful again our motto: out of many, one; unity in diversity; but unity eternally sacred and supreme! Who can stand at Gettysburg, that gateway, back through which the rebel hosts were sullenly withdrawn, discomfited, but not destroyed,—that promontory, against which almost for the first time in the East, the rebel floods were dashed in vain,—that resting-place, where thousands of brave hearts, of friends and foes, are bivouacked until the resurrection morn; who can walk the streets of long-beleaguered Vicksburg or Richmond; who can view the scenes where our gallant seamen have rained their storms of shot and shell into the fortifications of the foe; who can stand by the grave of that man of the people from Illinois,—without feeling that all these achievements and memories and associations are new bonds of national life? Artifice could not make the nation one. White-haired eloquence, uttered with fervor apostolic, could not make it one. It had grown beyond the power of every external appliance. Some new element needed to be infused into its very life. And this could be done only by national suffering. And let

us remember that into this national life God's providence has introduced not the white man alone, but the black man also. Henceforth, by all that he has patiently and sublimely endured, by all that he has heroically done, the negro is an integral part of the nation. He should have his monument at Fort Wagner and Fort Pillow.

In the second place, these monuments and memorials keep alive a nation's sense of indebtedness to her ancestors. Ingratitude is the great sin of the living present. Obligations to the past are too frequently forgotten. This, too, is a peculiar sin of Americans. There are, doubtless, thousands, and perhaps tens of thousands, of the dwellers in yonder crowded city, who have never walked within the precincts of that memorable enclosure where the gallant and gifted, the heroic, Warren fell. And when they look out from their windows, they hardly discern the difference between this gray shaft and the many red ones which feed the flames of the manufacturer and lade the atmosphere with their dusky volumes of smoke. The tendency of the men of any generation is to live for themselves. But the patriot lives only for the future.

Death was the least fear of Warren and Prescott and their associates. They might have been called to face death upon the scaffold. And the battle of Bunker Hill converted what might have been a suppressed riot, with the ringleaders executed, into a revolution. But even the possible death of

a felon could not deter them from their generous undertaking. They were willing to forfeit every blessing which they possessed or hoped, if they could secure an inheritance of freedom for their posterity. Those fifteen hundred men, whom Prescott that day commanded, what cared they for a petty tax on tea? It was not the tax, it was the principle, which they resisted. "*Obsta principiis!*" was their motto. They knew that if they did not resist the beginnings of this injustice, it would fall more and more heavily upon their children after them. This great nation submits to taxation to-day with the utmost grace; deals out taxes, direct and indirect, without a murmur. Had the principle been just, she would have done so then. Infinitely more did she suffer, in the seven years' struggle which succeeded, than she could have suffered from the most tyrannical taxation. And it is because our ancestors so wisely forecasted the future, and sacrificed everything for it, that we owe them so much. They lived for posterity. They died for posterity. The husbands and fathers and sons, who went down to their graves during the war of the Revolution, died a vicarious death; died a death of substitution; died for us; died that they might make us and our children, in civil blessings, their heirs and assigns forever.

It is this faith in a great cause, it is this adherence to it, through suffering and sacrifice, that ennobles men and renders them worthy of rever-

ence. The men who labored during the hours of darkness on that sixteenth night of June, and fought beneath the hot sun of the seventeenth, were men who believed in God and the right; and therefore they labored and fought. That engagement was no freak of passion. They had consulted the oracles of the future. This particular battle might go against them. It did go against them. But they were willing to give the cause the baptism of their blood. They believed *it* could not fail. Throwing out of the scale this question of right and God, the Southern States, in their recent rebellion, were more likely to succeed than the thirteen Colonies. Nothing but faith in God and the right sustained us. Nothing but faith in God and the right sustained our fathers. They *believed*, and therefore they laid down their lives; and therefore they deserve to be honored by their children.

The fathers of this nation were men who have unprecedented claims to our reverence. If there has ever been any heroism since the world was made, I believe that theirs was the purest and noblest. If there ever were men who understood the fundamental principles of civil and religious liberty, the design and powers of a government, I believe that they were the men. We may prate about their nasals and their bigotry. Doubtless, their hats and coats *were* peculiar. They had some few prejudices, which their pert and superficial descendants are without. But, I believe that their God and ours severely condemns the irreverence

with which their memory has been treated by some of their children. If we have ever succeeded in building any living stones into the temple of church or state, it is only upon their foundation. They gave us the sublime first principles. The men of Plymouth Rock and Bunker Hill are the men to whom, under God, we are indebted for all that we have been and are; for all that we hope to be in the future. And if it is a sin and a crime for children to turn away in ingratitude from their aged parents,—to appropriate all the benefits of their early self-denial and struggles, and leave them to an old age of penury and solitude,—to be impatient at their old-fashioned ways and ridicule their peculiarities; are irreverence and ingratitude toward the fathers of the Republic no sin and crime? Is not that Jehovah, who was willing to be regarded their friend, and under whose auspices they inaugurated and established this great empire of freedom, insulted and repudiated when we derogate or detract from them and their work? Just as in our more recent national history, we cannot read the achievements of our ancestors, without finding *God* in them! And it is this very characteristic recognition of God which modern politicians and statesmen so-called have designated a contemptible cant,—as certain political writers in this country contemptuously designated President Lincoln's second Inaugural, so reverent and humble and Puritanic as it is.

In the third place, these national monuments and memorials keep alive and freshen our obligations to

the future. The present has a twofold indebtedness. It is indebted to the Past. It is indebted also to the Future. And the measure of its indebtedness to the Past is the measure of its indebtedness to the Future. Because of the seven years' battles of the Revolution, we owed to our children the four years' struggle through which we have just passed. The benefits which we received from our fathers, we were under the most solemn obligations to transmit to our children. And stupendous as has been the recent expense in life and treasure, we have paid for our free institutions no more than we owed to our fathers, — than we owed to our children. When, on these anniversaries, we hear the booming of cannon and the sonorous ringing of bells, at sunrise, mid-day, and sunset; when we stand by monuments erected to the memory of men or events; when we look up to God in gratitude for his interpositions in time past,—we are to remember that the future can be secured only by emulating the spirit of our fathers! There can be no inheritance of blessings, without the inheritance of corresponding responsibilities. God has appointed us the custodians of this vast territory, with all its interests, material, civil, moral, and religious. We cannot occupy, unless we guard.

A waste of waters and of winter, uncertain seas, uncertain shores beyond, thus it was when our ancestors put forth from Delft Haven. A bloody struggle, exile, and death were before them, June 17, 1775. And yet they did not falter, they did not hesitate. Thus



walked they by faith, and not by sight. And thus — let us say it humbly, giving God all the praise — have we of this generation passed through the great crisis of our time, — through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought and the shadow of death! And victory has only increased our responsibilities. If we had failed, we should have withdrawn to our limited territory, a homogeneous nation, hastening to cover up our shame and disappointment and sorrow in a more intense search for material prosperity. But we have not failed. God has taken off the incubus that weighed us down, and calls us to awake from our lethargy to a new destiny. He has wiped out the blot that was upon our escutcheon, and calls upon us to unfurl it again over the whole country, and let it flap its pure folds in the ears of tyrants and the oppressed the world over. But he calls upon us to enter upon this new Future, which he has rendered possible for us, — nay, which he has most solemnly covenanted and reaffirmed to us, by all the marvels of the four years past, — in the spirit of implicit trust in himself which characterized our ancestors.

There are moral battles to be fought, the results of which shall equal in grandeur the material ones, which our soldiers and seamen have lately achieved. It seems a great work, to give this land a pure and mighty gospel, as we have now redeemed it to the principles of universal freedom; to lift up the cross of Christ, as we have lifted up the banner of the republic. The great moral wastes, with which the land is covered, —

can these be reclaimed, and made to blossom as a garden? Can the prairie-bloom of Protestantism be expected in those portions of the land, where, as they sweep westward, tides of foreign emigration are leaving their *debris*, socially and religiously hostile to our civilization? Can the South, that Egyptian prison-house, whose doors have been thrown back by "Him that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth," and which shall no more "grate harsh discord" upon the ears of the oppressed, — can this South be reorganized, and reconstructed into a palace of civil and religious freedom, in whose symmetry and beauty the whole earth shall rejoice? Can New England, Puritan New England, be saved from the scepticism and rationalism and infidelity of some of her own institutions of learning, and the princely minds that preside and are furnished there? These are the questions which have taken the place of the great military questions of the day. These are the movements which should excite the attention, and inspire the prayers and exertions of the people of God throughout the land.

And it is within the shadow of yonder hill of sacrifice, where, as the patriarch upon Mount Moriah, "our fathers saw our day and were glad," and warmed and quickened by the associations which attach to yonder eloquent granite shaft, that these questions and movements ought to be considered. We can conquer this land for our Master, if we undertake it in the spirit of our fathers; if we are willing to take

our institutions with our household goods into emigrant-wagons, and follow the star of empire, westward to the Pacific, and southward to the Gulf. These rude vehicles are the Mayflowers of more modern days. If by no other method, the South can be reorganized, the West can be saved from Romanism and infidelity, as Kansas was saved to freedom. The heroism of the Revolution gave us a country. The heroism of our own times has redeemed and perpetuated it. We need the same heroism in the Christian Church. We need men who will stand in the imminent deadly breach, who will lead a forlorn hope, who will contend for the faith once delivered to the saints with the persistency and skill of those heroes, who have just returned victorious from the field. The same qualities are requisite for moral achievements as for military.

Error is always aggressive. While we sleep, the enemy is sowing tares. So it was in our struggle with the system of oppression; so it is and will be in our struggles to evangelize this nation and give it to our Master as his inheritance. The country needs a spiritual renovation as marked and triumphant as the political one now in successful progress. And, dark and forbidding as is the prospect, full of obstacles as is the way, if we have the faith with which our fathers wrested the country from the grasp of tyranny, with which our brothers have redeemed it to freedom, the thing will be done. It will cost us money, prayers, exertions, and that eternal vigilance which is no less the price of religious liberty than civil.

By his providence, God seems to say to us to-day, "O ye sons of the men, whose muskets swept down the flower of British arrogance on Bunker Hill! O ye kindred of the men who have been stayed neither by heat nor cold, neither by barbarities in the field or the prison-house, during the recent struggle with the South!—catch your inspiration, in the work of saving this nation for Christ, from the heroism of your brothers and sires! The unseen forces of Heaven are ranged upon your side. Greater is He that is for you, than any that can rise up against you. If you are true to your Leader, he will surely conduct you to victory."

Could we witness our young men rallying around the Cross of Christ, as they have rallied around the flag of their native land; would fathers and mothers point their children to the work of the Christian minister or missionary, rather than to positions of worldly ease and affluence; would the church pour out of her treasures, as our heroes have poured out of their blood; would she undertake a systematic and organized effort to carry the triumphs of grace into every community, into every household and heart,—then we should have spiritual jubilees corresponding to those civil ones which have lately filled the land with rejoicing. Stronghold after stronghold would fall, army after army would be compelled to surrender, leader after leader would come back to his allegiance, until not a standard of rebellion was left uplifted in all the land. Shall we not seek that baptism of faith,

which will prepare us for such a consummation? God forbid that these memorials of sacrifice and achievement for civil freedom shall ever be gazed upon by our children, with the reflection, that had the spiritual heroism of their fathers been equal to that other heroism which filled the land with monuments of military valor, their religious liberties never had been forfeited and lost. God forbid that when our children's children shall inquire of their fathers, "What mean ye by these stones?" there shall be occasion for any feeling of shame in the response. For if we are faithful to the principles of the gospel of Christ, if we make our people an enlightened Christian people, then our civil liberties can never be lost; the future will be as secure and as honorable as the past.

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